



PUNCHING Her Way to the Top

Air Force boxer sets high goals

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From the first day she seriously considered boxing almost three years ago, Staff Sgt. Charmaine Carrington felt she had what it takes to be one of the best female amateur boxers in the country. Flash forward to present day: that's exactly where she is after winning the 145-pound championship at the U.S. Armed Forces Championship in December. She defeated Marine Lance Cpl. Grace Kelly, helping the Air Force team to its

best finish in 20 years with four gold and silver medals. "That was Charmaine's best performance to date," said team coach Tech. Sgt. Ronald Simms. "I've never seen her so relaxed and confident."

Sergeant Carrington became the first female to make the all Air Force boxing team based at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, last year.

In tournaments last summer, she beat five of the top 10 ranked female amateur boxers, including then top-ranked boxer and now good friend Nasheba Thomas at the Golden Gloves tournament in Chicago. With a 14-2 overall record, she's hungry to remain at the top in 2004.

Sergeant Carrington grew up in California and was one of the oldest of seven siblings. Early on, she became more of a take-charge, call-the-shots type person, mainly because she helped her mom take care

of her younger brothers and sisters.

She's also the only female weapons load crew chief in the 33rd Maintenance Squadron at Eglin Air Force, Fla. In a sport and career field that are both predominantly male, she feels right at home.

Looking at her slender frame, one might wonder why she wants to box. Often during training sessions, she's the only female practicing, so she has to spar against men who outweigh her by 20 to 40 pounds.

"People who don't know me might think I'm prissy, but they don't know I've been a tomboy all my life," she said. "But those who do know me know I can be stubborn and bossy."

Dennis Walker, her coach and trainer since she started, often tells her to use her greatest advantage — speed — instead of standing toe-to-toe with her sparring partners.

Staff Sgt. Charmaine Carrington drives her blood-stained glove into the face of opponent Dora Vallerjo during a January 2003 decisive win in the 138-pound class. "I don't consider [boxing] violent," she said. "It's all about skill and technique." In this match, she became the first woman to compete in the box-offs. "She's going to be a champion," head coach Ron Simms said. "She has a champion's heart."

"He always tells me to get in there and box and use what I've learned," she said of her coach, who accompanies her to every fight. "He says I'm not in there to brawl. It's not a bunch of tussling and wrestling. It's an art."

Because her national competition has been in full swing, she's been in a boxing tournament every month since June 2003. With tournaments, family life and an Air Force career pulling her in different directions, she finds herself relying on support from co-workers, supervisors, family

and coaches to get through the fast-paced times.

"It's hard," she said of being separated from her husband, William, and 3-year-old daughter, Leilani. "The phone calls really help me, and I try to spend as much time as I can with them when I'm at home. They are so important to me, and they always wish me the best. It helps."

One phone call she looks forward to while on the road comes the night before a fight. William will call so Leilani can tell her, "Good luck, Mommy." She wishes she could take her family to every tournament, but since she can't, she knows she has their support.

"Some of the fights my husband has been able to attend; I could hear his mouth over everyone else's," she said. "He's my number one fan."

She also believes she's added some recruits for the Air Force. She answers a lot of questions about military life from boxers she meets and fights.

"I play Air Force recruiter at every tournament when I wear the uniform," she said. "Even the guys ask me how to get in and could they continue to box if they join. It's great."

Not satisfied with the success she had in 2003, she sees a tough, yet predictable, year ahead in 2004 and knows where she wants to be at the end of it.

"I want to be completely untouchable," she said. "If I'm going through these tournaments and winning, I'll really think about going pro. I want to improve everything. If it takes running six miles a day as opposed to four, or 500 to 600 sit-ups a day, I'll do it. I'm not where I want to be. I want people to say, 'You want to be like Charmaine Carrington.' " ❖

by Master Sgt. Keith Reed



by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung



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Sergeant Carrington (above) catches her breath during training with Air National Guard 1st Lt. Dennis Walker (top left), her boxing coach and trainer since she started her boxing career. ■ While another team member gets his hands wrapped (far left), she collects her thoughts before a match during the Air Force boxing championship. The November 2003 match pitted her against Elisabeth Villarreal, a contender from the San Fernando Boxing Club in San Antonio. ■ Sergeant Carrington enjoys a lunch break (center left) with her husband, Senior Airman William Carrington, and daughter, Leilani. As a weapons load crew chief with the 33rd Maintenance Squadron at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., her every waking moment is filled with work, family and training as she maintains her title as the military's 145-pound weight-class boxing champion. ■ A boxing coach on the Air Force boxing team carefully wraps her hands (left) before a match. The hand wraps help protect the bones and tendons of the hands while providing support to the knuckles and wrist.

Air Force sports

The Air Force sports program is designed to allow active duty, National Guard and Reserve members an opportunity to participate at the Air Force, Armed Forces, national and international sports events. The program has 15 different sports, including softball, volleyball, bowling, golf, soccer, basketball, and track and field.

To apply for the program, athletes must submit a completed Air Force Form 303, Request for USAF Specialized Sports Training. Experience in higher level competitions and recent significant performances in the sport are important to the selection criteria. And athletes must obtain supervisor, commander and fitness center director's endorsements.

Athletes selected for training are invited to attend trial camps and other Air Force championship events. Trial

camps are short in duration, physically demanding, mentally challenging and highly competitive. Athletes should be in top condition for the trial camps to best showcase their talents and abilities to the coach and other officials who will select the teams.

For more information on any of the sports programs, contact the Services Agency at (210) 652-3471/7021 or send an e-mail to web.sports@agency.afsv.af.mil.